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A SUMMARY OF AGRICULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS
RESEARCH AT STATE AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATIONS

September 1956

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I INTRODUCTION

The subject of agricultural communications research has been discussed frequently among State experiment station directors and agricultural college editors since the National Conference on Agricultural Communications, held in East Lansing, Mich., July 14-18, 1954. At that time a committee under the chairmanship of Dean and Director F. J. Welch, College of Agriculture and Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Kentucky, defined the need for a wider program of agricultural communications research and evaluation in the interest of improving agricultural communications activities in the USDA--land-grant college system.

The information given in this summary is based on replies received from all directors of the State Agricultural Experiment Stations to a circular letter (SES-SL-2160) issued on June 6, 1956. The summary also includes references to Federal-grant projects in some areas other than agricultural communications because certain phases of those projects have communications objectives.

On the basis of the letters received from directors and from cards in the Federal-grant project files, a total of 54 studies in which all or certain phases deal with agricultural communications objectives appear in progress, with some having been completed recently and others now in the near-completion stage.

II ADMINISTRATIVE STUDIES

(a) ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EXISTING COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAMS

Alabama	Editor and advisory committee are working with the station statistician in developing a questionnaire to gauge reader reaction to "Highlights of Agricultural Research."
Hawaii	Survey of readers among whom "Hawaii Farm Science" is circulated to determine (1) value of the quarterly and (2) how to improve and increase effectiveness of the periodical. The director is also serving on the Territorial Economic Planning and Coordinating Authority which has a current project on the effectiveness of mass media, channels of communication, and acceptability of new ideas and improved agricultural techniques.

(b) AS PRELIMINARY FOR IMPROVEMENT OF AGRICULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS AT THE INSTITUTION

Pennsylvania	Role of the Extension Specialist. This study is being carried on cooperatively with the Pennsylvania Extension Service and is financed by the National Project in Agricultural Communications.
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III EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNICATION METHODS AND MEDIA USED IN THE DISSEMINATION OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH RESULTS

Florida	Dissemination of Information on Agricultural Research Results. State No. 670. State fund support with small supplemental grant from National Project in Agricultural Communications.
Indiana	Current Marketing and Utilization Reports for Forestry. State 410. Has phases pertaining to agricultural communications.
Iowa	Effectiveness of Disseminating Agricultural Marketing Information by Television. State (Ag. Ec.) 1031.
Louisiana	Use and Potential of Television in Farm and Home Education. Rural Sociology 880. State and Federal-grant support. (For detailed description and objectives see also SES-OD-1103, Rural Life Studies.)
Mississippi	The Improvement of Agriculture Through Rural Development Programs. One objective is to learn what communication processes are involved. Information Sheet 540, Knowledge and Use of Recommended Farm Practices published in June 1956. Federal-grant (Rural Soc. HQ-1) and TVA support.
New Hampshire	Evaluation of Methods of Improvement in Decision Making. Farmers interviewed with respect to sources of information (a) by which they learn of new techniques, and (b) where they learn how to apply these techniques. State 61.
N. Y. (Cornell)	A Study of Methods of Increasing the Effectiveness of the Work of the Extension Service With Low-Income Farmers, Part-time Farmers, and Rural Non-Farmers. This is most important of a number of Cornell projects having communications objectives. Hatch Amended (Rural Soc.) 158. (See also SES-OD-1103, Part 20, Rural Life Studies.)
Oregon	Three studies grouped under one title, How Oregon Dailies and Weeklies Use OSC News Releases: I. The Effect of Content, Story Length, Geographical Area on Story Use, Story Placement, and Time Gap. II. The Effect of Farm Pages on the Use of Agricultural News Releases. III. The Effect of Geographical Area on the Use of Home Town Specials.
Vermont	A Study of the Educational Effectiveness of Television, State-supported and sponsored in part by a grant from the National Project in Agricultural Communications.
Washington	Evaluation of the Farm and Home Unit Approach and Other Extension Approaches. Federal-grant (Ag. Ec. Rural Soc. 1298).

III EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNICATION METHODS AND MEDIA USED IN THE DISSEMINATION OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH RESULTS (Continued)

Wisconsin

The Acceptance of Improved Farm and Home Practices As Related to Family and Other Group Factors. Rural Soc. 842. E. A. Wilkening, Rural Soc., Project Leader. (Federal-grant support). This study deals with the role of communicating agents in the process of acceptance of farm practices. It is concerned with informal as well as formal communication channels and how their use is related to characteristics of the receiver and to the type of information disseminated. (See also SES-CD-1103, Part 20, Rural Life Studies.)

Studies completed or in progress of completion in the Department of Agricultural Journalism (State support):

- (1) Effect of Length and Detail on Farmer Acceptance of Publications.
- (2) Direct Mail Announcement of Agricultural Publications.
- (3) Newspaper and Magazine Reading in Rural Wisconsin.
- (4) Effect of Color on Response to a High-Attention Publication.
- (5) Level of Knowledge of Soils Terminology Among Selected Wisconsin Farmers.
- (6) Frequency of Economic Terms in Farm Magazines.
- (7) Legibility of Types for Television Titles and Visuals.

IV COMMUNICATIONS PROCESSES AS FACTORS IN STIMULATING USE OF NEW SCIENTIFIC FARMING AND HOME-MAKING PRACTICES

Illinois

A Study of Major Reasons Why Farmers in Illinois Accept or Fail to Accept Certain Approved Farm Practices, and Testing Methods to Increase Acceptance of These Practices. Project includes designing an experimental "communications plan" on soil testing to increase adoption of soil testing in a given county. Federal-grant (Editorial and Rural Soc. 01-311) support. (See also SES-CD-1103 Part 20, Rural Life Studies.)

Indiana

Levels and Methods of Improving the "Food Literacy" of Consumers. State Project 353.

IV COMMUNICATIONS PROCESSES AS FACTORS IN STIMULATING USE OF NEW SCIENTIFIC FARMING AND HOME-MAKING PRACTICES (Continued)

- Iowa The Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology Department has 2 projects under way, and the Home Economics Department has 1, which bear directly or indirectly on agricultural communications research. One of these, Patterns of Social Relationships and Lines of Communication in Rural Iowa Communities (Ag. Ec. 1236), is under the leadership of Dr. G. M. Beal, co-author with Dr. J. M. Bohlen of "How Farm People Accept New Ideas," a North Central Regional Extension Bulletin published by Iowa State College.
- Kentucky Spread of Recommended Farm Practices. One of the objectives is to identify some of the communication factors and processes that speed and retard spread of improved agricultural technology and to specify conditions under which these factors operate. Federal-grant support (Rural Soc. 305). (See also SES-CD-1103, Part 20, Rural Life Studies.)
- Louisiana Factors Which Influence the Preparation of News Stories by Extension Service Agents. A study undertaken by a graduate student in Agricultural Extension Education.
- Maryland Studies in Social Organization With Application to the Maryland Agricultural Extension Service. Includes communications objectives. State 4 (Department of Rural Sociology and Division of Research and Teaching).
- Missouri All formal research in agricultural communications is concentrated under Hatch No. 29, (Rural Soc.) Social and Cultural Factors Affecting the Dissemination and Use of Scientific Farm Information by Missouri Farmers. State funds contribute to this research and in the current year a special grant has been awarded by the Foundation on Human Behavior.
- Ohio An Appraisal of the Role of Current Economic Information as Used by Farmers and Other Agricultural Interests in Making Production and Marketing Adjustments as It Relates to Objectives of Agricultural Policy. The study seeks to inventory and evaluate the available source and media of economic information for farmers, determine the extent of use made by farmers in making production and marketing adjustments, determine the effectiveness of economic information in guiding farmers' decisions and to achieve similar objectives some of which are of a communications nature. A Federal-grant-supported study (Ag. Ec. and Rural Soc.). (See SES-OD-1103, Part 20, Rural Life Studies.)

IV COMMUNICATIONS PROCESSES AS FACTORS IN STIMULATING USE OF NEW SCIENTIFIC FARMING AND HOME-MAKING PRACTICES (Continued)

- Ohio The Communication Process and Its Relationship to the Adoption of Farm and Home Practices. Aims to study the communication processes and communication media involved in acquainting Ohio farm families with new practices and has numerous other objectives dealing with communications. It is a Federal-grant-supported project (Ag. Ec. and Rural Soc. 166). (See also SES-CD-1103, Part 20, Rural Life Studies.)
- West Virginia The Diffusion of Recommended Farm Practices in Two West Virginia Counties. This study seeks to determine the sources of farm information which farmers consider most important, sources of information for specified farm practices considered most important by farmers in two counties, and the degree to which farmers have adopted these practices. A Federal-grant project (Ag. Ec. and Rural Soc. 65). (See also SES-CD-1103, Part 20, Rural Life Studies.)

V DEVELOPMENT OF METHODS FOR USE IN COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH

- California Sample Design and Sampling Methods for Agricultural Data. Research undertaken is essentially methodological in character. Appraisals are being made of existing procedures for obtaining basic data in California and to develop sampling procedures particularly adopted to California conditions. Federal-grant-supported (BJ 9, Ag. Econ. 1429).
- Iowa Development of Devices for Evaluating the Effectiveness of Home Economics Programs. State project (Home Ec. 1215).

VI PHASES OF AGRICULTURAL MARKETING
RESEARCH HAVING SOME COMMUNICATIONS
OBJECTIVES

Western
Regional WM-21
Contributing
Stations
Colo., Mont.,
Nev., N. Mex.,
Tex., Utah,
Wash., Wyo.

Improving the Usefulness of Livestock Marketing Information. To further regional research pertaining to methods and techniques for obtaining and supplying Western stockgrowers with information needed for more effective marketing of livestock. Includes inventory of existing Federal, State, and private information available to farmers including media. Where inadequacies are found seeks to develop methods to close gaps between existing services and the ideal form and content of information to be of greatest benefit to livestock farmers.

Southern
Regional SM-20
Contributing
Stations
Ga., S. C.,
Tenn, W. Va.

Improving the Usefulness of Livestock Marketing Information. Projects under way in the States mentioned include phases dealing with media and sources of information similar to WM-21. Further details on individual projects will be made available in the Marketing Research Summary of Federal-grant Research at State Agricultural Experiment Stations (to be issued about Jan. 1, 1957.)

Indiana

Analysis of Farmers' Selection of Market Outlets and Sources. State 773.

Maine

Marketing Practices for Maine Processed Crops. Includes phase dealing with survey of local and national advertising. Federal-grant-supported. Ag. Econ. 56 (contributing to NEM-16).

Maryland

Marketing Forest Products. A study is being made on the use of market news and trade news publications by Christmas tree growers. Federal-grant-supported project. (BJ, Sec. 9A-26).

Nevada

Improving Current Market and Market Outlook Reports. In obtaining information about ranchers and their operations, the project also seeks to learn about their sources and use of market information. Federal-grant-supported. (Ag. Ec. Hatch 38).

VII DIRECTORS' COMMENTS AND EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST
IN SOME STATES REPORTING NO ACTIVE STUDIES

Arkansas	Although there is no current research under way, information has been obtained from some past Federal-grant studies that will have significance in summarizing research results in this field.
California	Formal and informal discussions are held on many occasions for the purpose of developing better techniques of getting agricultural information to farmers.
Colorado	There have been discussions directed toward a project on determining to what extent experiment station publications and other information outlets can be improved for use by Colorado farmers.
Kansas	A minor study on radio communications is being carried on in the Speech Department of Kansas State College.
Oklahoma	Station is in process of planning administrative studies and/or research on the production, distribution, and use of station bulletins, extension circulars, and similar media.
South Carolina	A number of administrative steps have been taken to improve publications, releases, and communications efforts generally. The new proposed Regional Project S-31 of interest.
Tennessee	The information office has made several informal studies for its own guidance, e. g. periodic surveys of information used by newspapers, magazines, and radio stations.
Texas	Director expresses considerable personal interest in the general topic of agricultural communications, although he points to the scarcity of personnel with training and time to carry on objective studies in this field. Several years ago he became one of the original sponsors of a proposed regional study on agricultural communications. No specific action was taken until this year when the Southern Experiment Station Directors, upon recommendation of SRRC, approved the development of a regional project statement under the designation of S-31 and appointed Director L. E. Hawkins (Okla.) Administrative Adviser.

VIII RESUME'

Directors' replies to SES-SL-2160 reflected a desire on their part to know more about what has been done and is being done in agricultural communications research, some apprehension concerning the availability of personnel qualified to do research in agricultural communications, and an expression of need for getting this field of research organized on a systematic basis. A constructive viewpoint suggesting a desirable point of departure in an agricultural communications research program is contained in the following excerpt from the reply received from Dean and Director Floyd Andre of Iowa State College:

"I do agree that a national summary of the results of the studies on the communications (projects) which have been completed would be of real value to those engaged in this kind of research. It is becoming increasingly apparent that communication is one of the more difficult areas for research and on which not nearly enough attention has been directed in the past. There has not been too much good research done on communications, but certainly a summary and evaluation of that which has been done is basic to needed research in the future. I would assume that Project S-31 would have as one of its goals a complete review of the work that has been done in agricultural communications as a basis for going ahead with work on that project."

Research in agricultural communications is difficult because precise study of a specific problem presents many intangibles. For example, to distinguish accurately between primary and secondary influences resulting from the use of specific media and methods is almost impossible. Again, the use of questionnaires and surveys can be misleading or lead to wrong interpretations unless planned and used by persons with training in scientific sampling. This is why proposals that contemplate little besides making simple surveys are not considered eligible for Federal-grant fund support. In brief, there is a great need for developing accredited methods and procedures for carrying on research in agricultural communications and the expansion of training of personnel to handle the necessary techniques. In the meanwhile, it is necessary to rely on related fields, such as statistics, psychology, and sociology in the development of methods applicable in agricultural communications research.

In general, the review of previous research and the evaluation of current proposals for research in agricultural communications indicates that specific standards have not been established and probably cannot be until there is a greater background of experience. The use of the long established principles applied in scientific research will facilitate greatly the understanding of problems and what is to be done toward finding solutions. Research in communications can be as fundamental and contribute as much to agricultural progress as research in other areas. The challenge and the opportunity need to be kept in mind as research is being considered for finding the ways whereby communications can make the greatest contribution to agricultural progress.

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